

S-E-C-R-E-T

C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y
O F F I C E O F N A T I O N A L E S T I M A T E S

15 December 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: What are the Soviets up to in Yemen?

CONCLUSIONS

A. We think that the aim of the USSR in Yemen is to come to the support of a "progressive" regime threatened with imminent disaster, and thereby to save what it may -- at comparatively small expense or risk -- of the large investment it has made since 1962 in a republican regime in Yemen.

B. Success in this effort would help to rebuild the general Soviet position in the Middle East.

C. Beyond this, the Soviets may see in the developing situation in the Peoples' Republic of South Yemen a reason for seeking to maintain a position in Yemen itself.

GROUP 1
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1. The June war in the Middle East jeopardized the Soviet position in the area as a whole and in Egypt and Yemen in particular, positions which had been gained by long and expensive endeavor and which the Soviets must have regarded as being of some importance. The UAR's heavy military investment on behalf of the Republican regime in Yemen since 1962 was in large part out of the Russian exchequer. Immediately after the death of the old Imam in 1962 the Soviets provided some advisers and some pilots for bomber aircraft used against Royalist positions. Until recently, however, the Russians' military dealings with the Yemenis have been through the Egyptians.

2. The compulsions upon Nasser to withdraw from Yemen were so great that the Soviets could not reasonably object, unless they were willing to put up the money to meet his financial needs arising from the war. Whether the Soviets and the Egyptians consulted on the manner of the withdrawal and the future of the Republican government is not clear. It would appear that the Egyptians proceeded to abandon their enterprise in the Yemen without much thought for the future of the Republic. If they had engaged in any advanced planning with the Soviets they could have been expected to leave aircraft and armor behind for the use of the Yemeni Republican government.

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3. Because of the closure of the Suez Canal, the only way they could come to the aid of the new Republican regime in Yemen was by a substantial airlift. Furthermore, with the Royalists pressing in on Sana, airstrikes were the only way to repulse the attack. Since the Yemeni Republicans lacked pilots capable of performing the task at hand, the Soviets were obliged to supply pilots as well as aircraft. These airstrikes, plus forays outward from Sana with the little armor still in Yemeni Republican hands, have for the time being blunted the Royalist attack on the capital, though they are on the offensive in other parts of the country.

4. Why have the Soviets at this particular time and in an apparently dramatic manner moved to support the Yemeni Republic? The Soviets certainly do not want to see a "progressive" Republican regime destroyed. They may believe that the regime, with a modest amount of support, has a fair chance of holding on and controlling at least part of the country. The Soviets probably know that the Saudis have continued to pay money to the Royalist forces in Yemen these past months and that arms for the Royalists have at least passed through Saudi Arabia recently if they have not come from Saudi Arabia. The Soviets may believe that the US is behind

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such support of the Royalists. They probably consider also that they stand to gain a good deal of influence and prestige among other Arabs if the Republican regime survives with their help. They may even believe that the Yemeni Republican Government will be such that they can effectively though discreetly dominate it, if it remains in power.

5. It is possible that the Soviets have some aims for use of Yemeni territory in the future. They may wish to have the use of Yemeni ports or airfields to support clandestine operations in Africa or the Arabian Peninsula. As far as we know, they have done relatively little of this during the five years of Egyptian control. A port with refueling facilities may be of some importance to them, although Hudeydah's entrance channel limits its use to vessels of moderate size. A combination of such military or para-military uses could add up to a Soviet "base" or facility, even though it almost certainly would not be called one.

6. The Soviet decision must nevertheless have taken into account the obviously negative and unpromising factors in the situation. The Egyptian experience cannot have been encouraging. Clumsy and incompetent as they were, they could claim to be Arabs and they had a leader with great appeal to all anti-Royalist

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Yemeni. It seems unlikely that the Soviets would contemplate carrying on the Egyptian campaign with their own ground and air forces, even granting their much greater military skills. Furthermore, the Yemeni Republican regime is a weak reed. It may be an improvement over Sallal's government, but it will have many enemies, even among anti-Royalists. And the war between the Republicans and the Royalists will certainly go on. Right now it seems likely that the Royalists, with the additional supplies which the Saudi's are likely to expedite, can continue to hold the upper hand in the wilder areas of the country and press the Republicans hard even in those places like Sana where they are best able to take advantage of the few modern weapons they have and where Soviet air support is most effective. Taking the most optimistic view of the situation from the Soviet perspective, we cannot see how a Republican victory throughout the country can be anticipated in present circumstances.

7. Altogether, we think the most likely explanation of Soviet moves to support the Yemeni Republicans is that they are reacting, in a way natural for them, to the distress of a "progressive" regime. The cost of their action is relatively small and involves little risk. The necessary airlift and the

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expenditure of resources thereon is no great matter for the Soviets. The commitment of Soviet pilots probably required harder thinking, but the precedent for foreign nationals to fight at the invitation of the recognized government of another country has been well established.

8. Apart from considerations affecting Yemen itself, the present uncertain situation in the newly formed Peoples' Republic of South Yemen may provide the Soviets with a further reason for seeking to maintain a position in Yemen. A good deal of jockeying among rival elements within the PRSY government is still likely before its make-up becomes clear, and the orientation of the resulting regime will almost certainly be subject to influence by outside forces. In these circumstances, it seems reasonable to assume that the Soviets would not abandon their foothold in Yemen so long as it can be preserved without any very great expense or risk.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Director

25X1

Sherm

Isn't the Soviets in somewhat the same position we were in Vietnam some years ago? Analogies are

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dangerous, I realize, but that last sentence (ringed above) is a bit misleadingly shy. Can't we come down harder? M

DATE 5 Dec 67
FROM SHERMAN KENT 5:20 pm
TO: Mr Helms

Here's our thoughts on
what Sovs are up to in
Yemen. We did it in a
rush, & we didn't
coordinate it with the O/C
boys or Jim Critchfield.

MEMORANDUM FOR:

Dev Folsom

e

(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
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(47)

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